. . . And Trod the World's Wilds

FALO KILL DOUGLAS?

A TRUE ADVENTURE STORY

By CECIL CLARK

ably the result of old snow blindness) and reluctantly he gave up the project and returned to Oregon.

He nearly didn't return, for one afternoon his canoe dashed on the rocks in the canyon below Fort George, and he and his companions were swept down river into an eddy.

He decided next to visit the island of Hawaii and sailing from San Francisco, landed in Honolulu at Christmas time, 1833. Intrigued by the volcanoes on the neighboring island, he roamed their jungle-clad slopes, often penetrating deep into the craters. Douglas was a man who had to investigate.

IT WAS ON THE MORNING of July 9, 1834, that he set out from Kohala Point on the north end of Hawaii to follow the trail to Hilo, about 50 miles away. He stopped overnight on July 11 with a rancher, who next morning showed him the trail, warning him to look out for buffalo pits, dug by natives to trap wild cattle. First cattle, by the way, were brought to the island by Capt. George Vancouver. Down the trail strode Douglas, his terrier at his heels, and hours later a passing native noticed the small dog sitting forlornly beside one of the cattle pits. Glancing into the muddy depths he saw "Kauka" (the doctor) lying dead, the 35-year-old botanist apparently killed by a trapped and epraged buffalo. Help was summoned and it was concluded that Douglas had accidentally slipped to his doom.

It was at this spot in 1934, on the hundredth anniversary of his tragic end, that a group of interested Hawaiian residents erected a stone cairn, and nearby planted a grove of 200 young Douglas fir, the project being made possible by funds supplied by the Hilo Burns Club.

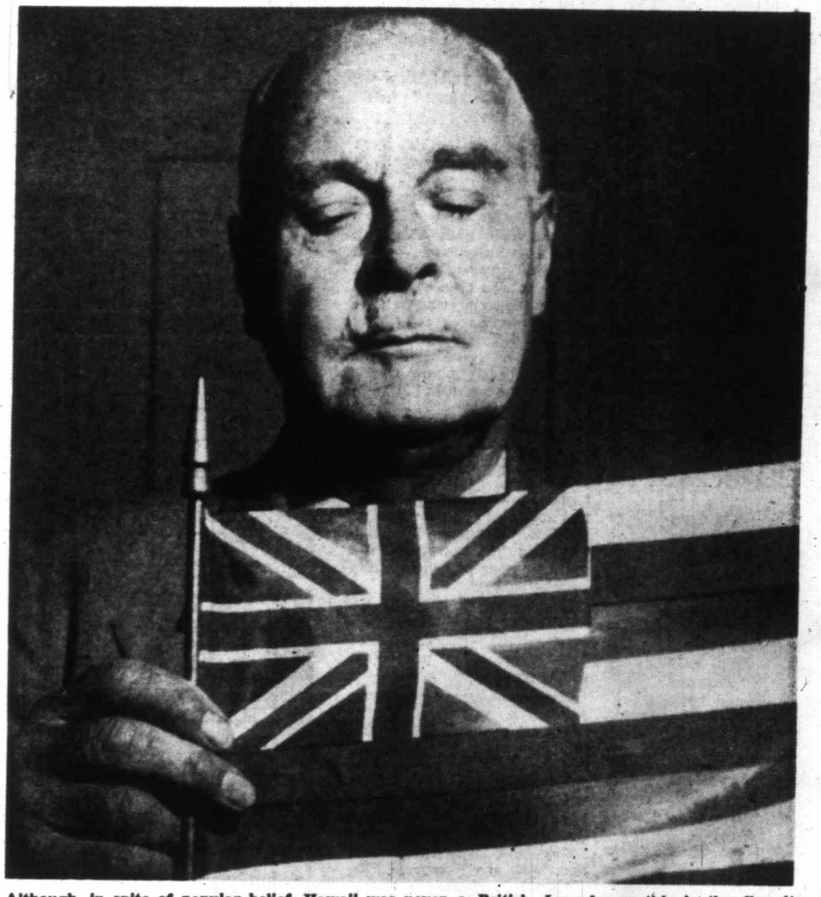
Greatest monument to the famous botanist is of course the tree that bears his name; a tree that has been no small factor in B.C.'s growth and sound economy. It accounts for over 40 per cent of our $200,000,000 annual forest revenue. You get its significance when you learn that last year's cut would have built 125,000 five-roomed houses!

With an interest in the Douglas story, five years ago I noticed our Provincial Archives lacked pictures of the Hawaiian cairn and the plaque in the Honolulu church. To try to fill the gap I wrote to Hawaii, but somehow my letter went astray or unanswered. Three years later when I noticed a Canadian naval flotilla about to visit the Islands, I besought the good offices of Capt. Bob Welland, RCN, then in the Ontario. Again fate stepped in when Capt. Welland had to regretfully advise me that the cairn was too far off the beaten track to make an expedition possible in the limited time schedule. Which left me still like a hitch hiker, thumb extended, waiting by the roadside for another Polynesia-bound traveller.

He came along, just before last Christmas, in the person of fellow Scot (and fellow member of the Saltaire Society of Victoria) Major D. M. A. "Dave" Murray, off the fifth time to spend a winter holiday in Hawaii. Hastily I briefed him on what was needed, and got his friendly, "I'll get you the pictures" type of assurance.

A couple of months passed, then one day I got his cryptic, air mailed note "Mission Accomplished."

When he returned and handed me the pictures, I heard just what the "mission" entailed. First it required a 90-minute airplane flight from Honolulu on the island of Oahu, to Hilo on the neighboring island of Hawaii, and pre-arranged introductions to 50-year-old Hilo-born rancher, Pono Beamer, whose son "Towhead" had to drive Dave in a station wagon the 30-odd miles from Hilo to mountainside Humuula (pronounced Hoomooolah) through sugar cane, cattle and sheep raising country. Country that required permits to pass through everyone's property, including the vast Parker cattle ranch. A permit was also required from Col. L. W. Bryan, chief of Hawaii's forest service, to pass through the Hilo forest reserve. No difficulty about this, however, for Col. Bryan, well up on his Douglas lore (he has written on the subject) was personally interested in the original cairn project.



Although, in spite of popular belief, Hawaii was never a British dependency, this is the flag its people will probably adopt if and when they achieve statehood. It came about this way: Capt. George Vancouver gave a Union Jack to King Kamehameha and the king flew it until it was tattered. But during the war of 1812, on the advice of Yankee skippers, the king added the stripes as a matter of diplomacy. Major Murray here holds the unofficial Hawaiian flag, with the Jack "to the mast" and red, white and blue bars spreading to the fly.

AT HUMUULA, the 6,000-foot-high mountain trail had to be tackled by four-wheel-drive jeep, to traverse the mountain top trail from southwest to northeast. On the way, Dave Murray told me, the jeep angled and tilted through gullies and watercourses, pilot Beamer wrenching the wheel over lava beds, occasionally hanging on to what appeared a mere goat trail. Finally after three unforgettable hours, the jeep pulled up in a forest clearing where the stone cairn marked the spot where David Douglas died. Long ago the natives dubbed the spot "Kaluakauka," meaning "doctor's pit," and on the cairn in bronze is the legend:

"Kaluakauka.

In memory of Dr. David Douglas killed near this spot in a wild bullock pit, July 12th, 1834 A.D. This tablet erected 1934 by the Hilo Burns Club."

Long ago the buffalo pit was filled in, but Major Murray reports the Douglas firs have prospered, and are now about 15 or 18 feet high.

David Douglas' remains were buried in the old native churchyard of Kawaiahao Church close to civic centre on Honolulu's King Street, where Congregationalist services are still held, in Hawaiian, every Sunday. The Douglas gravestone in the church yard however, became so weathered and undecipherable it was moved inside and put on the church wall. Below it the Royal Horticultural Society has mounted a plaque giving the original Latin inscription, and a translation. It reads:

"Here lies Master David Douglas, born in Scotland, A.D. 1799. An indefatigable traveller, he was sent out by the Royal Horticultural Society of London and gave his life for Science in the wilds of Hawaii, July 12th, 1834. 'Even here the tear of pity springs; and hearts are touched by human things . . . Virgil."

Below this is another plate with the legend:

"The Royal Horticultural Society grateful to his services to Horticulture and Botany caused this copy of the crumbling inscription to the memory of David Douglas to be recorded in 1929."

While originally it was thought Douglas met death accidentally, researchers (which include Hawaii's Forestry Chief, Col. Bryan) have tended more to the opinion that the famous botanist was murdered, murdered by Ned Gurney, the rancher with whom he stayed the night before he was killed. Facts are, that Gurney was an ex-convict from the penal settlement at Botany Bay, who disappeared from the Island soon after Douglas' death. No money was found on Douglas' person and from the appearance of the bullock's horns after the animal was shot, they could hardly have been the cause of Douglas' injuries.

Anyway, now through the kindness of Major Murray, and his many friends on the Island of Hawaii, particularly Col. Bryan, Provincial Archivist Willard Ireland has a full set of pictures of the cairn and the tablets in the Honolulu church.

One person who will be particularly glad to receive a set is elderly Miss Cecilia Garvie of Briar Cottage on the Perth Road in Scone. Interested, because she is the last living descendant of the famous botanist's family.